

ASUU STRIKE: THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT AND NIGERIAN EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM

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Abstract

Education remains the biggest industry and cuts across every sphere of human existence and endeavour. Education promotes swift industrialization of economies by making available managerial, technical as well as professionally skilled human resources. The universities exist and play pivotal roles in educating a greater portion of individuals and breed new potentials for action. However, there are several factors that have bedeviled the smooth operation of universities in Nigeria. This study examines those factors. The study argues that the percentage allocation to education in Nigeria is inadequate and recommends, among others, that government should invest more resources to the development of infrastructures in universities as well as pay all outstanding debts owed to ASUU members and other employees in public universities.

Keywords: *ASUU strike, educational system, Nigerian government, industrial actions.*

1.0 Introduction

“Education is not just a commodity for sale. It is a social good. It is the social responsibility of any government to its people. It is the engine of growth, development and transformation of any society. Higher education restores to mankind its humanity. The university is the brain box of the nation. To shut it down is to a nation the equivalent of a stroke to a person. There is a nervous breakdown.” Aidelunuoghene (2014).

Several literature have x-rayed the significant relationships between university education and societal development (Arbo and Benneworth, 2007; Trippl, Sinozic and Smith, 2014). For about a thousand year now, universities have existed and played vital role in educating a greater portion of individuals, perform research, advance understanding and new technologies, and breed new potentials for action (Group of Eight, 2013). At such, the importance of universities cannot be over-emphasized (Hill, 2006). Regrettably, irrespective of the numerous advantages of university education in Nigeria, the educational sector still faces numerous challenges. These challenges have deterred the sector from achieving optimum results and meeting up the requirements of the 21st century. According to Aidelunuoghene (2014), the standard of education in Nigeria is deteriorating as the day goes by.

Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU) on the other hand has explored several industrial actions to ensure that the government pays some listening ear to the problems bedeviling the educational system of the country. Popular among these actions is the strike; which is outright stoppage of work by all academic staff of public universities in the country. Strike is basically

targeted at mounting pressure on the government or employers to change some policies as well as improve the welfare of workers (Amadi and Precious, 2015). The current study investigates the rationale for ASUU strike as well as the role government should play in the development of the academic system in Nigeria. Other aspects covered in this study includes: the contributions of university education to political, economic and social development of Nigeria and the effects of strike actions on students' academic performance and Human Resource Development in Nigeria.

2.0 Industrial Action (ASUU Strike)

Before conceptualizing industrial action, it is pertinent to briefly consider industrial relations because industrial conflict in itself is a characteristic attribute of industrial relations. In the words of Okaka (2011), industrial relations is the pattern of interaction that exist between trade unions (or employees) and employers. It includes all the issues affecting human resources as well as the effort of the government in such human resources management (Fajana, 2005). Whenever these relationships go sore, there is bound to be industrial action. Industrial action is any form of action by employees which is aimed at forcing the management or employers to come to terms with the demands of the employees. Industrial action is often as a result of conflicting interest between employers and employees in respect to working conditions, wage demands, management policies, etc (Admad and Basheer, 2012). In the words of Given and Grace (2014);

“Industrial action means any action which affects, or is likely to affect the terms or condition, whether expressed or implied, of a context and which is taken by any member or body of workers acting in combination or under a common understanding as a means of compelling their employer to accept or not to accept terms or conditions of or affecting employment”

Industrial action occurs as a result of dispute between employees and employers of labour. Industrial disputes according to Praveen (2011) are disputes between employees and employers on any ground, which could finally result to strikes, lockouts, etc, which affects both parties on either the short or long run. Industrial action is a characteristic attribute of collective bargaining in particular and industrial relations in general. It is the weapon of power in the hands of employees against employers which is utilized whenever situation demands. From independence till date, Nigeria has been faced with several industrial disputes, most popular among them is the ASUU-Federal Government face-off which seems never to end (*See table 1*). Strike is one among numerous forms of industrial actions. Strike connotes a persistent refusal of employees to engage in part or all of the service for which they were employed. It signifies a partial or total breakdown of cordial relationship between the management and staff. In the hands of the employees, strike is a veritable tool that is used to press-home their demands and force the management force the management to act accordingly. ASUU considers strike as the last option that is potent enough to influence government decisions (Tahir, 2014; Ibrahim, 2015).

Table 1: Some popular strikes by ASUU 1999 – 2017

YEAR	STRIKE DURATION
1999	Five months strike
2001	Three months strike
2002	Two weeks strike
2003/2004	Six months strike
2005	Three days strike
2006	Three days strike
2007	Three months strike
2008	One week strike
2009	Four months strike
2010	Over Five months strike
2011/2012	Three months strike
2013	Over Five months strike
2017	Three weeks strike

Source: Aidelunuoghene (2014); and Authors compilation.

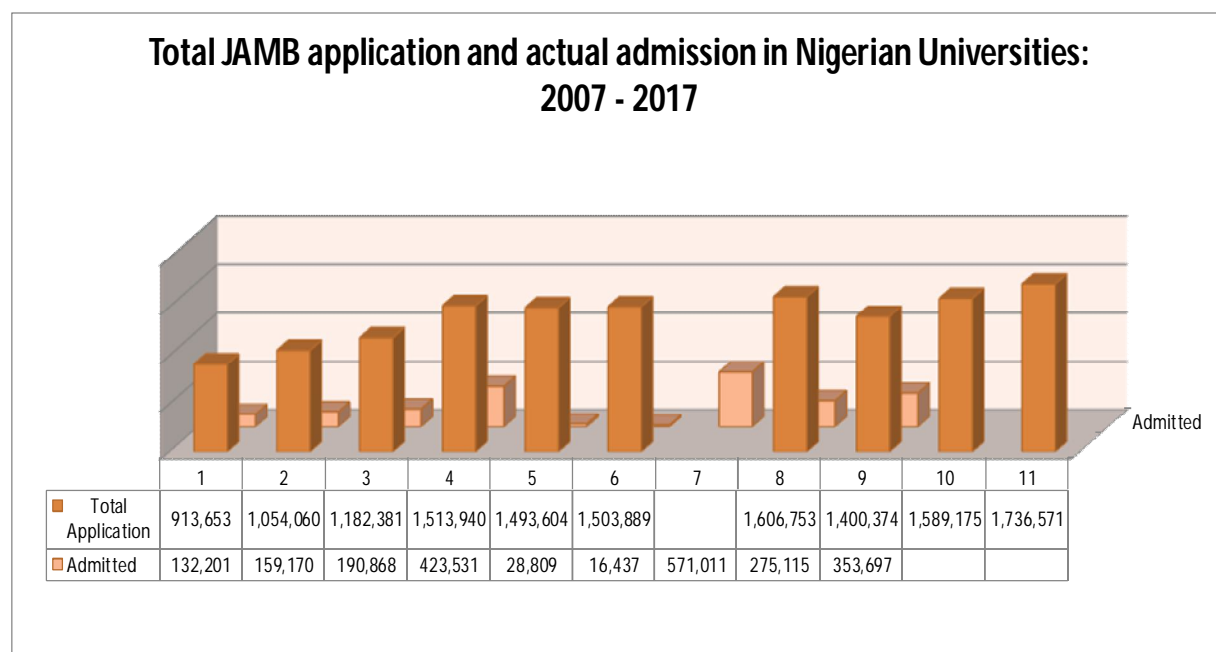
Industrial action is the antithesis of industrial peace. Industrial peace, on the other hand, is a state of no industrial action between employees and employers of labour. It is a friendly and cooperative agreement as well as a harmonious terms and condition of employment in the organization (Osad and Osas, 2013; Akuh, 2016). Industrial peace encompasses collective bargaining, employment policy, communication, etc, and it is an imperative for productivity and rapid growth of every work organization (Odia and Omofonmwan, 2007; Ladan, 2012). Nwokocha (2015) recommended that collaboration, participatory management, team work, as well as expended collective bargaining framework must be spotted in every work organization that seeks to remain competitive in the global business arena.

3.0 The Present Condition of Nigerian Universities and the Rationale for ASUU Strike

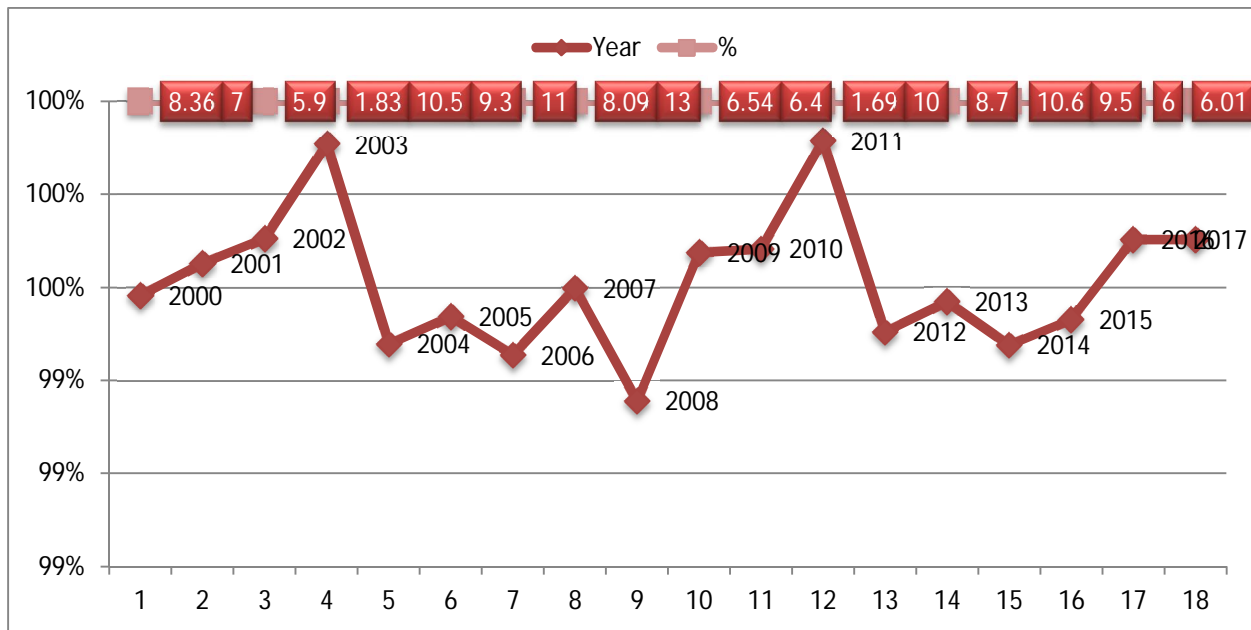
It is a proven fact that formal education is capable of enhancing societal growth and economic development (Otonko, 2012). Education remains the biggest industry and cuts across every sphere of human existence and endeavour (Blaike, 2002; Okebukola, 2008; Ajayi and Adeniyi, 2009). Education generally has promoted swift industrialization of economies by making available managerial, technical as well as professionally skilled human resources (Tilak, 2009). In Nigeria, the universities have contributed to many success stories. One can imagine what life would have been in the country without education (Coupled with the level of corruption bedeviling the country). However, corruption is not the emphasis of the current study. The university has helped create a democratically strong, self-reliant and dynamic economy in Nigeria with lots of opportunities for young citizens (NTI, 2010). Irrespective of the numerous advantages of university education in Nigeria, the educational sector still faces numerous challenges. These challenges have deterred the sector from achieving optimum results and meeting up the requirements of the 21st century. The major problem facing educational sector in Nigeria is funding. The funds provided to universities are inadequate as compared to the nation's population. The resultant effect of this is the drastic

reduction of intake on yearly basis (*see figure 1*). Analysis from figure 2 shows that the educational sector which is the most important sector in Nigeria still remain underfunded and has failed to meet the 26% benchmark recommendation of United Nations Education, Social and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) for developing countries.

Figure 1: Showing Nigerian universities inability to admit enough applicants.



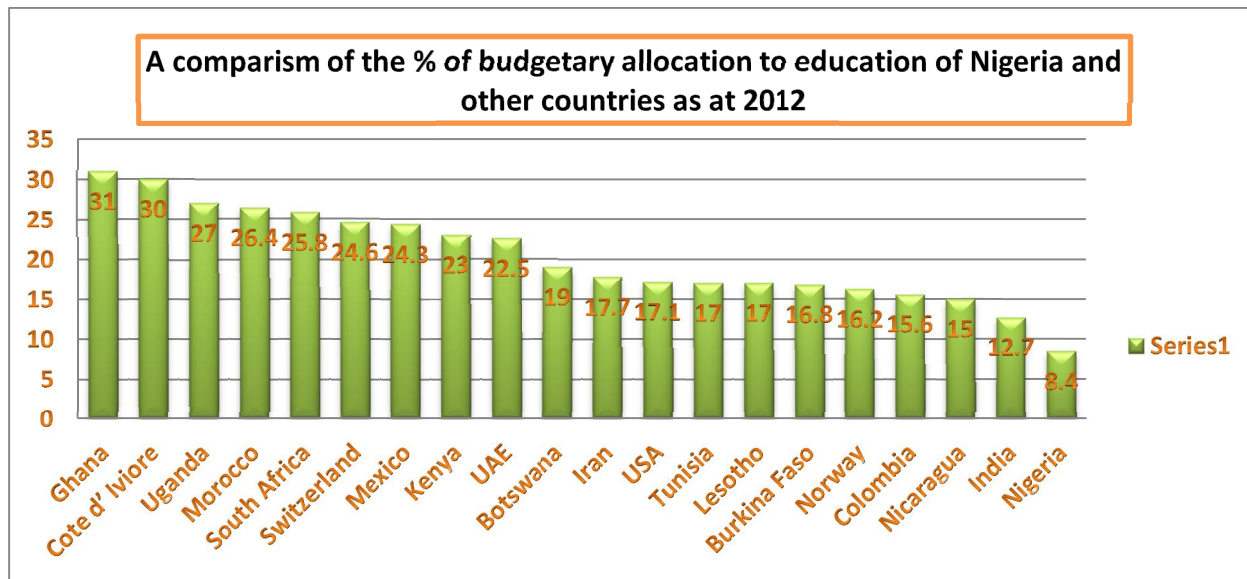
Source: Paul (2017); Fapohunda (2016); Administrator (2017); Daily School News (2014); Micaiah (2012); and Authors' compilation.

Figure 2: Budgetary allocation to education in Nigeria: From 2000 to 2017

Source: Authors' compilation

Statistics have also shown that the percentage allocation to education in Nigeria is inadequate as compared to other African countries like Ghana and Kenya (see figure 3) and this position has been sustained from 2012 till date. The key outstanding issues leading to ASUU strike include:

- i. Payment of fraction/Non-payment of salaries
- ii. Non-payment of earned academic allowances
- iii. Non-release of operational license of NUPEMCO
- iv. Non-implementation of the provision of the 2014 Pension Reform Act with respect to Retired Professors and their salaries
- v. Removal of Universities Staff Schools from funding by Government
- vi. Funds for the revitalization of Public Universities (Implementation of Needs Assessment Report)
- vii. Poor funding of existing State Universities and proliferation of universities by their visitors (Agbakwuru, 2017).

Figure 3: Budgetary allocation to education between Nigeria and selected countries

Source: Matthew (2016).

4.0 Why Government should come to final settlement with ASUU

There are several literature on the contributions of universities to societal development (Arbo and Benneworth, 2007; Tripp, Sinozic and Smith, 2014). Universities have existed and served the society for about a thousand year. Irrespective of the complexity, connectivity and dynamism of the world, the university has continuously played a critical role in educating a greater portion of individuals, perform research and create new understanding, new technologies and new potentials for action (Group of Eight, 2013). The benefits university education has been vital to a lot of people including those living well beyond the city where the university is located (Hill, 2006). The unique characteristics of higher education have created a strong bond between university and the society (Duderstadt, 1999). Universities are key generators of human capital, and are often every city's largest employer of labour and a significant economic engine (Friedman, Perry and Manendez, 2014). Ajayi (2014) noted that a university is a knowledge provider and can only progress when it is properly managed. The roles of the university are limited only to individual's imagination. The university is an agent of economic growth (Holland, Liadze, Rienzo and Wilkinson, 2013; Brennan, King and Lebeau, 2004; Sienesi and Reenen, 2003), it improves the rate of young people's participation in the affairs affecting their societies because they have vital contributions to make (HEFCE, 2013). The university improves the wider innovation system, an idea which is later turned into reality (Nesta, 2012). The universities have helped transcend the contemporary social structure, institutionalize a new social order (Badat, 2001), and aid rapid political transformation (Schwartzman, 2003). Higher education, according to O'Connell (2016), once presented a secure pathway to high-skill, and high wage jobs. But these seem almost defeated today.

The role of universities in modern societies cannot be over-emphasized (Abdulkareem, 2001; Aluede, Idogho, Imonikhe, 2012). Research conducted by academics have help improve the living standard of several people, fight against as well as reduce epidemics, promote well-being, reduce infant mortality, improve the transport system, improve communication and information delivery, expand civilization, strengthen interpersonal relationships, among others. There is no gainsaying that globalization, as enjoyed today, is a creation of education through universities. The world we

live in today have been made a global village where there is an easy way to engage in almost every dealings. It is therefore important that necessary actions should be taken by the government to put the universities back in good shape. This will enable the universities to constantly conduct sound academic research, teach in a more comfortable environment, enjoy freedom of teaching and academic self-governance (Boulton and Lucas, 2008), this however requires some reasonable level of funding (Ajayi and Ekwudayi, 2008). The Nigerian universities lack modern teaching gadgets, no internet facilities, overcrowded lecture halls, poor libraries, ill-equipped laboratories, very poor staff-student ratio: ranging from 1:363; 1:122, abandoned developmental projects, poor sources of water and toilet system in hostels and lecture venues, low staff strength as well as under-qualified academics with alarming number of junior lecturers as against experience (senior) lecturers. All these and many more are issues to be concern about.

5.0 The Negative Impacts of ASUU Strikes

“Education has various definitions. Education is the process of acquiring knowledge, skills, attitudes, interest, abilities, competence and the cultural norms of a society by people and to transmit this life to the coming generations so as to enhance perpetual development of the society.” – (Lawal, 2013).

The negative impact of ASUU strike affects both students’ academic performances and the Nigerian national economy. This section considers the effects of ASUU strike on student academic performance and national development.

5.1 On Students’ Academic Performance

The financial and other costs of university education in Nigeria treats to the future of literacy campaign in the country. Further, the recurrent strike actions by academic unions have discourages both current students and admission seekers. ASUU strikes have usually affected the students in a number of ways. This includes but not limited to lack of opportunities to make up for lost times and inadequate implementation of curriculum (Bello, 2008; Kazeem and Ige, 2010; Adesulu, 2014). Strike action renders both students and lecturers emotionally and psychologically unstable (Iheanacho, 2002; Isangedighi, 2007; Ibrahim, 2015). Strike action usually prolongs students’ academic years and most of the students end up missing the Federal Government compulsory National Youth Service Corps (NYSC) programme as a result of over age. Also, while other students begin their second degree or master’s degree at age 22, some Nigerian students are not sure of obtaining a first degree even at age 30 majorly due to incessant strike actions and lack of proper funding of the universities to be able to admit a large number of students. Medical, Law as well as final year students faces the greatest impact of strike actions in Nigeria which affects law school, horsemanship and degree examinations respectively. ASUU strike usually has a culminating effect on programmes and activities of other important bodies not limited to NYSC, Unified Tertiary Matriculation Examination (UTME), National Examination Council (NECO) and West African Examination Council (WAEC).

5.2 On National Development

Development as a process affects every sphere of human existence (Etesike, 2017). Development improves the quality of life of the people through political, economic, social and cultural transformations (ololobou, 2003). Rapid development is powered by education (Inyamah, 2010; Abolade, 2003), through continuous research, as conducted in universities and other institutions of higher learning. Development encompasses every activities aimed at improving the conditions of human existence (Aboyega, 2003). Development is societal advancement (Lawal and oluwatoyin,

2011). Education is a fundamental human right and tool for national development (Allam, 2007). Education fast-tracks national development through key aspects like human capacity building, skilled workforce development and empowerment (World Bank, 2002; Bennel, 1996; Allam, 2007). Therefore, prolonged and incessant strikes hinder all of the following:

- i. Social integration
- ii. Rural regeneration
- iii. Political efficiency
- iv. Cultural development and maintenance
- v. Human resource development
- vi. Proper understanding of civic responsibilities
- vii. Socio-economic progress
- viii. Potentials development
- ix. Modern men creation, and
- x. Improved social philosophy

From the aforementioned, it becomes imperative for the government to ensure that every issue affecting the smooth running of the universities are sustainably resolved because the university is a blessing and not a curse in any way to Nigeria.

6.0 Conclusion

This paper examines the rationale for ASUU strike, the effects of ASUU strike on student's academic performance and Human Resource Development, as well as the role government should play in improving the educational situation of the country. It is the argument of this paper that the percentage allocation to education in Nigeria is inadequate as compared to other African countries like Ghana. Also, issues like payment of fraction/non-payment of salaries, non-payment of earned allowances, poor funding of universities, among others, should not be heard of in a country like Nigeria, most especially in this 21st century.

7.0 Recommendations

This paper recommends that;

- i. Government should pay all outstanding debts to ASUU members and other employees in public universities.
- ii. Payment of earned allowances should be made on time (as at when due)
- iii. Government should invest more resources to the development of infrastructures in universities. Also, modern teaching facilities and equipments should be introduced in every public university in the country.
- iv. There should be swift implementation of the provisions of the 2014 Pension Reform Act with respect to retired Professors and their salaries
- v. Finally, as government provides funds for the revitalization of public universities, a central body should be established to monitor and report the progress of the revitalization progress.

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